

**Testimony of Haskins Literacy Initiative to the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut
Legislature concerning the Commission on Children**

March 16, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I am speaking on behalf of the Haskins Literacy Initiative which is the teacher-training applied research arm of Haskins Laboratories in New Haven. I respectfully urge you to maintain funding for the Commission on Children. Since 2000, CT teachers whom we've trained to teach reading, and the children whom these teachers have taught to read, have been the benefactors of the Commission's vision, policy acumen, and dedication to raising the achievement of every child in our state.

Specifically, the Commission helped bring to light that for many years, only 4 out of 10 CT fourth graders scored at grade level and our state's achievement gap is one of the largest nationwide. Over the past decade, the Commission has kept reading in the forefront in many ways – through the Early Reading Success Legislation, by spearheading the Connecticut Early Reading Success Panel that produced Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement, by promoting school readiness and by fighting to preserve Early Reading Success funding.

In fact, it was the Commission who persuaded Haskins Laboratories to share scientific research and to develop a model to bring comprehensive, research-based reading instruction into schools. It was the Commission who introduced legislation to require early childhood and elementary school teachers to pass a reading instruction test in order to become certified. The legislation failed, but the Commission did not as Commissioner of Education Mark McQuillan implemented such a policy effective July 1 of this year.

The Commission has been instrumental in assisting parents in learning how to advocate for their children. The Parent Leadership Training Institute and Parents Supporting Education Excellence are well-organized, high-quality efforts at engaging parents in community involvement on behalf of their children. These programs are critical in building the necessary infrastructure to ensure that children have what they need to be successful in life.

My Hartford kindergarteners know the meaning of the word 'perseverance' because of the excellent vocabulary instruction they are receiving. As an educator of our neediest students in thirty years of teaching I have not seen so much positive growth in reading achievement for our youngest students as in the past several years. We would not be doing this good work without the 'perseverance' of The Commission on Children. This is not the time to change teams or lose momentum when our children have so much at stake. We are finally teaching children to read on schedule. The Commission has

the experience, track record and vision to get at the prevention issues that will make this generation of children more successful.

There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Commission has been accountable to the state of Connecticut and our children. Now it is time for the state to remain accountable to our children, by standing by the Commission. If they can't speak for our children, who will?

Thank you for listening and respectfully submitted,

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